

Transcript

Hosea

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Selkirk Street Evangelical Church 10/04/1999

Please note, the readings are from an older version of the NIV. The New International Version was revised in 2011 and the reading is available on [Bible Gateway](#)]

00:00

Now as Douglas has said, we start this new series, five books from the Old Testament from what we usually call the Minor Prophets. Now the Minor Prophets is just the name we have for the last twelve books of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, they were all one book called the Book of the Twelve. Now the New Testament speaks about all the Old Testament Prophets, Major and Minor, and uses this expression; 2 Peter 1, "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Now just think about a title for the series for a moment or two: "Men spoke from God." "Men spoke." Now these men used the language of their day, the language of their time, Hebrew. And they spoke with different accents. They had their own style, each of them. Their own emphasis given to them by God. Their own content. They were all very different. But then think about the second bit of our phrase. It says, "Men spoke from God", in all that variety, which is as very as you can find among twelve people. There is a unity. An essential unity, because one voice sounds through them all. Among these twelve authors we have one ultimate author. For in them we hear the very voice of God.

01:54

And so, the opening words of the first of these twelve, the opening words of Hosea are these: "The word of the Lord came to Hosea".

There is a lot in this little book. But as we look at it, what we've got to do is to say this. Here is a book which speaks to us about a situation when this man, this spokesman of God, spoke to the people of God. And as we hear him speaking to them, according to the end of the book, we should also, with discerning mind, hear God speaking to us. That's the whole point in reading it.

02:52

Now then, we just select readings from the book beginning at the beginning. As I said, this is a long book, fourteen chapters, and we're just going to take selections from it in our way of approach to the message of it tonight.

03:04

Hosea 1:1

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, son of Beerai, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:

When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of

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the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord." So, he married Goma, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel."

Goma conceived again and gave birth to a daughter, then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah, and I will save them not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God."

After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah Goma had another son, then the Lord said, "Call him Lo-Ammi for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

Yet the Israelites will be like the sand in the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people, they will be called sons of the living God." The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land for great will be the day of Jezreel. Save your brothers, my people, and of your sister, my loved one.

05:33

Now Chapter 3:1.

The Lord said to me, "Go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.

So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver, and about a homer and letheq of barley. Then I told her, "You are to live with me for many days, you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."

For the Israelites will live for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol, afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to His blessings in the last days.

06:40

Now Chapter 14.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

Your sins have been your downfall!

Take words with you

and return to the Lord.

Say to him:

"Forgive all our sins

and receive us graciously,

that we may offer the fruit of our lips.

Assyria cannot save us;

we will not mount warhorses.

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We will never again say 'Our gods'
to what our own hands have made,
for in you the fatherless find compassion."

"I will heal their waywardness
and love them freely,
for my anger has turned away from them.
I will be like the dew to Israel;
he will blossom like a lily.
Like a cedar of Lebanon
he will send down his roots;
his young shoots will grow.
His splendour will be like an olive tree,
his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.
Men will dwell again in his shade;
they will flourish like the grain,
they will blossom like the vine—
and his fame will be like the wine of Lebanon.
O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?
I will answer him and care for him.
I am like a green pine tree;
your fruitfulness comes from me."

Who is wise? He will realize these things.
Who is discerning? He will understand them.
The ways of the Lord are right;
the righteous walk in them,
but the rebellious stumble in them.

08:44

Every preacher pays some price for his preaching. And all of the Old Testament writers, prophets, suffered in costly terms, personally, for the service that they brought to God and none more than Hosea. Because the word and truth of God came to him not in a vision, not in a dream, but in the most intimate experience of human life in his own marriage experience.

09:18

First of all, meaning in a marriage, the first three chapters of our book.

The story of Hosea's marriage is told in the merest outline. We are not given details about feelings or anything like that. But in sharp focus the plain details are given to us. Hosea, believing it to be the will of God and out of love, married a girl called Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. In due course, they had a son and then a daughter and then another son. And then horribly and tragically, everything went wrong, because Gomer got up and left, went away. And the news came to Hosea that she was living with another man, as the Bible puts it plainly for what it is she was living in adultery.

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Now we're not told how Hosea felt. We can imagine that, or what the wagging tongues said as they looked on. But there is in simple essence, the picture that's presented to us at the beginning of this book. Every marriage breakdown brings with it distress and trouble and turmoil of an unspeakable kind, and doubtless it is the same in this particular instance.

11:09

Then when we move over, we discover that Hosea, believing it to be the will of God and out of love, goes seeking after Gomer. Not because there were any hopeful signs there. But seeks her out and then puts the price down, buys back his own wife. Notice what it says, 15 shekels of silver and a quantity of barley. It looks as if he had trouble scraping together the amount. It came to some 30 shekels which was the price of a female slave. Because the tragedy of Gomer was, not simply that she'd gone away, but she'd fall into even worse condition. She became a prostitute and in the absolute control and slavery of another. Yet this man sought her out and brought her back.

12:14

And then the touch of realism, he said to her, "Now look, there are terms that you've got to face here. You'll come back, you'll stay with me, but make it clear to yourself, the sordid ways of your past are done with. And the simple condition is this, you will never, never, never be intimate with any man. These are the conditions." And we hear no more about the story of the marriage except for its meaning, because its meaning is the important thing in this particular book of the Bible.

12:56

Now let's think about the meaning of this.

First of all, the wife. Perhaps when Gomer got up and went, some people said, "What a mistake that man of God made." Think of Hosea, getting in tow with a trollop like that. But Hosea in his book meets it clear that this was no mistaken move by some whim. He sees this as the very will of God for him: God knew from the very beginning what was going to happen. And believing wholly in the Lord, he receives the message which his marriage has for Israel, for us.

13:50

Next, the children. The three children who are born are each given very significant names. Hosea didn't pick the names. They're chosen for him, as with Isaiah's children. They are part and parcel of their father's ministry. This is why I'm saying the whole marriage has meaning.

14:20

First, the boy is born, called to be called Jezreel. And that indicates judgment, punishment. God says, "Call him that because I am going to punish the house of Jehu and the people of Israel because of the bloodshed that was passed." Now, the story of Jehu, we can't go into that, how he brought for the time being an end to Baal worship. How he carried out and was praised for carrying out the command of the prophet. But who went far beyond his remit in lust for blood, in terrible bloodshed and slaughter and massacre, as Hosea calls it. And became full of his own importance and in arrogant

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disregard of the law of God went his way and the people followed him. However, the message is one of unrelieved judgment, punishment.

15:20

Next, the daughter, she is called Lo-Ruama, that's not, not Ruama, not pitted, not having received mercy. And that's an even more and even deeper sense of judgment. God is not going to have mercy on this people. He has turned away from them and said, "I will not love you I will not have mercy on you."

15:49

And the third, the son, he is called and this is the climax of this whole meaning at this stage, " Lo-Ammi, not my people." God says, "You're not mine." True, I called you into covenant with me, but you are not my people. Now, these are tremendous words, weighty words of judgment.

16:20

Because the marriage you see, this covenant bond. Marriage being an institution given to us by God, not what some people say, they are just a kind of convention. This bond, this marriage bond, is a picture of the close covenant bond of God with his people. And as Gomer was unfaithful to the marriage vows, so Israel has been unfaithful to her covenant vows and departed from the living God. This is the root of all the trouble.

But in the story, in the first three chapters, we then read about God's holy, redeeming love. Notice in the story how I said, Hosea went out in search for Gomer. Now, it's not that he did that out of love and then suddenly it dawned on him, "Oh, that's what God's love is like." That wasn't the way at all, because chapter 2 makes it very clear to us as 3 does. That God taught Hosea in the depth of his tragic circumstances, that he, God, had a profound love for his people and he would search after them. And it's the love of God that comes first that moves Hosea to show this love to Gomer.

17:57

So we read in the important words at the beginning of the third chapter. Notice the constant repetition of the word love. Four, in fact, if we read it carefully, there are five mentions of it, love. The Lord says to Hosea, "Go again," if we take it very literally, "Go again, love a woman. Love your wife". Not go and find her. Not go and see if you can make anything of her. Not go and show her some kindness. He says, "Go and love her." But true love is not blind. Go and love her, though she is an adulteress and loved by another man. Might even be in love with another man. The, the, how shall I put it, the pure faithful love of Hosea is seen in contrast with the tawdry thing that Gomer knew in a distance.

19:14

Now he says, "The Lord, as the Lord loves Israel, though she has turned away" and noticed the utter banality, the triviality of all this "and loved raisin cakes." You see that, you see the ridiculous contrast. The heartbeat of the eternal God set aside love for raisin cakes.

19:49

So, you see the story unfolding of how God calls the people to Himself to live for Him, with Him, seeking Him only in the end, as Hosea put down the conditions for Gomer.

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Now he comes to the whole message of the book as it spans chapters 4 to 14. Being very selective of course.

In this episode of unfaithfulness, we note, first of all, signs of serious trouble, as the book of Hosea opens them up to us.

First of all, the signs politically.

20:36

In foreign affairs, the people have shown the people of Israel have shown their departure from God by the way they behave in international relations. Now Hosea belongs to the 8th century BC, and the great superpower of the day is Assyria. With Egypt still having some pretence to power in the south. And these two are the great powers that dominate the story 4 to 14 in constant references to them throughout the book.

Now Hosea's message is to what we call the northern kingdom, Israel. And in that northern kingdom, Hosea lived in the time of a long reigning king, mentioned in the opening verse. Jeroboam, that is Jeroboam the second. Now he had a long and outwardly prosperous reign. There was a great increase in trade, great flourishing of prosperity. For most of his reign there was much affluence in Israel, as there was in the neighbouring Judah under Uzziah. But with that affluence came ease, decadence and corruption. And when the times of trouble came, as the great power of Assyria began to rise again and take a close interest in what was going on in Syria, in Israel, in Judah and the borders of Egypt. Then when trouble came, what happened? Well as the prophet makes clear, and as the others make clear, instead of staying in loyal trust and hanging on to the very hems of God's garment, instead of that, sometimes they would appeal to Assyria for help. And other times they would go to Egypt.

22:42

And this is the constant reference in the book in foreign affairs, I just mentioned one or two. He says, you forsake your trust in God and make rapidly overtures to Assyria and appeal to Egypt. Ephraim, which is his common name for the Northern Kingdom, he says, Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king, that is the Assyrian emperor. "Like a silly dove", he says, stupid and senseless, cooing to Assyria and calling to Egypt.

Now it was bad enough for the people, for Israel to appeal to one of the powers, Assyria. It was the height of folly to appeal to both. But they didn't seem to see that. The prophet does. So he says, your error is "you make a treaty with Assyria and you send loads of olive oil to Egypt", trying to placate them. You see, you pay tribute to one, sometimes tribute to the other, hoping for protection. Internally, the story is one of terrible instability.

24:05

Just briefly, just after Jeroboam died, within the next 30 years there were no less than six kings. Six of them in 30 years! Now all these kings, four of them reigned for two years or less. Four of them were assassinated, four out of six! And one of them was deposed. You can see, its disorder, anarchy. Until finally, Samaria the capital city

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collapses in 721 BC in fulfilment of the prophet's word, and the northern kingdom is no more, politically.

24:55

But now getting nearer to the heart of things morally. Amos and Hosea speak words of strong rebuke to the northern kingdom. Because what is clear is, there is a virtually total disregard of the law of God. Every commandment is broken. There is in Hosea's terms, as I summarize it; there is an appalling decadence, wickedness is rampant, and dark ugly shapes are seen everywhere. Here are his own words; 'cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery'. They break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed. There is also uncontrolled drinking and unbridled sex. There is an awfully modern ring about this book. The fathers are charged with their wicked ways and, he goes on to say this to them, your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery. You see the cult prostitution connected with Baal has its morally effect throughout the whole of their society. It is in fact a sex mad society that is being described, and no social service, no educational problem [programme] can solve the issues.

26:38

Thirdly, morally there is insecurity and instability in a lawless society. Law and order breaks down. Hosea says they practice deceit; thieves break into houses and bandits rob in the streets. A grim state of affairs.

But now we come closer to the heart of the matter so far as we are concerned. The signs of trouble religiously or spiritually.

Now outwardly there were all the trappings of the religion, the temple worship and the sacrifices. That was all going on. The official national religion was in place. If you like to put it in modern terms, folk were still going to church. But as Hosea makes clear, the reality is a very different matter. There is a wholesale departure into idolatry of alarming proportions, because the people have gradually and then totally accepted the culture that surrounds them. The practices of pagan heathenism seen in Canaanite society, the worship of what we call Baals.

28:08

Baal, the God of Canaan, who was said to bring prosperity to the crops, in order to make their crops fruitful and successful. Then the Israelites were drawn into worshipping these false gods, and into all that was associated with fertility cults of wickedness and corruption.

So, there were high places. There were altars, to these gods. There were centres in Gilgal, in Bethel, which the prophet calls not Bethel 'House of God', but Beth Aven 'House of Wickedness'. Here is what he says, you can get the sharpness of this word, "They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood." That's what your gods are, he says. "They sacrifice on the mountain tops and burn offerings on the hills under oak, poplar and terebinth". Then the famous rounding phrase: "Ephraim", that is the people, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone!".

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They consecrated themselves to the shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they worshiped. "They have their images of silver" he says. Beautifully produced, the work of craftsman. Then he says this, "it is said of this people", now listen to what it says, "it is said of this people, they offer human sacrifices and kiss calf idols."

30:10

These are the people who were committed to the lively oracles of God. So, the whole tale unfolds of one at the heart of the nation of unfaithfulness to Lord their God. So, he says 'there is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land.' My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, and he rounds on the priests and says, 'you're to blame for it. You have not brought my word to the people, so that they've broken the covenant and forgotten their maker.' So much have they forgotten God, that they've forgotten what God is like. Hosea says you've forgotten that God is sovereign, that's what sin does to people. It blinds their minds to the truth of God. You've forgotten, you think God doesn't know all about this, but God is sovereign, God says 'I know all about Ephraim. His sins are open and clear to me.'

31:18

They've forgotten something else, and this is one of the main burdens of Hosea's book. They've forgotten that God is holy, and inevitably that means warnings of judgment for the people. In general, a people without understanding will come to ruin, God will pour out his wrath upon them like floods of water. And the famous word here, most people will know this even if they don't know it comes from Hosea: "they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind".

'Palaces fortified cities, great towns and bullworks, strong fortresses will prove of no avail', he says, when the foreign invader comes, you will go either as refugees to Egypt or captives to Assyria.

32:14

Now then, is this gloom unrelieved? I mean, what is there for us in this? Well, we have to reckon with all that I've said, if we're going to hear the important word that Hosea has to say to us.

It's not unrelieved gloom because at every juncture in the book suddenly, we're taken by surprise by a message of hope, even in the very first chapter. We read about the people, being like a visual, going to become like the sand in the seashore in fulfilment of the great promise to Abraham. And whereas Hosea had to say, my son is called "not my people" because you're not my people, yet they will be called the 'sons of the living God'. God's purposes will not fail. And far beyond their reckoning, there will be drawn in to the people of God, people from every tribe and nation to be one people.

33:10

But it's the 14th chapter that brings in summary message for us the whole import of this book. Because here is a message to people who are prone to wander and liable to backsliding.

It was a Christian, an old man of many years' experience who used to frequently to pray like this in a prayer meeting that I regularly attended every week. He used to pray like this, he used to say, "Lord, I am always wandering and coming back again." It was

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no profligate who said, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the Lord I love."¹ And the thing about it is that waywardness and backsliding is very, very like what it's called in this book, unfaithfulness, infidelity in marriage.

34:24

Now, as far as the experts tell us, in all the breakdowns of marriage documented, it is not very common that a man wakens up one day and says, "I'm finished with this marriage, I'm away to find somebody else." But what happens is that subtly, imperceptibly, over a period of time, a relationship is developed with somebody else. Perhaps somebody he works with or sees in some particular situation. And that development takes place gradually and gradually until his heart is taken away. And before he realizes the full impact, he's gone.

35:04

Now, it's like that in backsliding. What I mean is, it's not that a person gets up one morning and says, "Ach I cannae be bothered with this reading of the Bible. I'm not going to have any more prayer. I'm given it all up." But the people I've counselled say, "Well, you see, I'm not quite sure, but I got very busy. And I found it very hard to find time to read my Bible. And it happened ever so gradually. And somehow or other it got less and less, and then I stopped doing it. Don't ask me, Whatever, why? But I stopped doing." And what about prayer? "Well, I didn't really have much time. Just a few words in the morning, then off to my work and I was so busy doing the rest of the day, I really forgot all about it. Then I was so tired at night, I went to my bed, and it just developed that way." You see, it happens so gradually because really backsliding is first a thing of the heart.

36:16

Now, what's to be done about it? Well, chapter 14 tells us. We have the great call to repentance. True repentance, according to this chapter, the opening words, means three things and we should all pay close attention to. Three things.

First, it means turning. "Return O Israel to the Lord, your God". In other words, recognize you're facing the wrong way. Your sins have been your downfall and before you is the slippery road to ruin, but behind you is your God, turn back all the way to God. Let this be personal and whole-hearted.

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Now, in the sixth chapter, there's a marvellous passage. People will remember it, set in paraphrase to the tune Kedron as arranged by the late Sir Hugh Robertson.² Wonderfully sung, but unhappily. The Israelites did not really respond in chapter 6 with their whole heart. It was just a thing of words. And we've got to see in this chapter that repentance, half-hearted repentance, is no repentance at all. It must be total, a total turning to the Lord. The God with whom we have to do doesn't deal in half measures.

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¹ [Come, Thou Fount of every blessing](#). Author: Robert Robinson (1758); Alterer: Martin Madan (1760)

² [Come let us to the Lord our God](#) Hosea 6:1-4

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So, we have to return to the Lord. And all our dealing with God has to be for real. No pretence. Oh I know we can we can shout the right words with the orthodox, we can sing the hymns with the loudest voices, but what is going on inside is what matters. So, it's a whole-hearted turning to the Lord. For we're talking now about the most precious relationship of life, the soul with God. Turning.

And then confessing. Take with you words, he says, and say to him. That is, make a clear confession without any reservations and ask God to forgive all your sins. God's view is your sins are the trouble, then just accept that. Change your mind about yourself. Recognise yourself as God sees you and call the deeds by their right name. Call them sins and confess them to God.

38:57

Has this saying to do with Christians? Everything to do with Christians! Crucial to our fellowship, our relationship with God is that word in 1st John: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Confessing, confessing like that is important and we cast ourselves, as Hosea says, on the grace of God and as a result we begin to confess in a new tone. Thankful praise, the fruit of lips, as Hebrews 13 takes up this phrase, that make confession to his name.

39:50

And then very important there is forsaking. The passage speaks not just about turning to God but turning from the old ways. There is a need to confess but there is also a need to forsake. And evangelicals have got to realize that. It is not just a word of making confession with our lips. There has to be reparation in our lives. We have to forsake the thing that we say we abominate.

I know that some people say, "Ah well you know what these Catholics do." They go on a Saturday night, and they make confession and then by when's they they're back doing the same thing. Now if that's right, and I'm not sure it is, but if that's right then we can see what's amiss about that. But what if we are confessing to God and then we're just going on doing the same old things? No wonder we are cold in heart and slow to understand if that's the level of our communion with God, rather are we to turn from these things as they were to turn from Assyria and as they were to cast off their idols. He says, "You can't cling to me and your idols". It can't be done. And somebody who knew a great deal about backsliding and was greatly troubled by it wrote the great words, appealing for a closer walk with God: "The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be. Help me to tear it from your throne and worship only you, only thee."

41:46

Well then, when that happens, what's the result? There is all the joy of restoration and renewal, which I just mentioned. The personal Word of God: "I will heal, I will love." It is characteristic of the God of the Book of Hosea that with our tender love, far outweighing all that people ever know or expect, he draws his people, he draws us to him. When Israel was a child, I loved him and taught him how to walk. Even in the day of darkest judgment, God is heard to say in this book, "How can I possibly give you over for I love you?" And it's that kind of God who welcomes us to him when we come in our broken confession to him. And we find in spite of everything, that amazing, warm love

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of God, that the modern hymn writer says, "What kind of love is this?"³ Or a few years ago, Michael [Norman] Barrett, "Your love is the most incredible I have ever known."⁴ Or an even older hymn writer, "The love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind and the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind." This is the God we know. And in the bliss of that renewed relationship with God is all the joy that he imparts. His precious promises. In figures that Hosea like to use freshness, 'dew on the grass,' in a parched land like Israel, how welcome it is. Or the 'fragrance of the lily'. This freshness of communion that God brings to us. Whereas out in the world they say, "Huh, your religion it's just, you get every morning you read your Bible and you pray the same old thing every day. Not realizing the freshness that this brings, the newness of the new day it brings, the dawning of opening relationships and greater knowledge of our God." There's all of that. There's the steadiness it imparts, as strong as the cedar with its deep roots. And there is the fruitfulness that it brings, the promises of blossom in the vine and grain bearing fruit.

44:32

But note the final plea: "O Ephraim, I have nothing to do with idols." By that simple word, we are brought to the very test of our spirituality. Not what are we doing? not what are we saying? not how are we singing? but how goes it between our heart and the Lord? Is there anything that takes His place?

What kind of a marriage relationship is it if the wife cannot love her husband wholly because she's drawn away to other men or vice versa? It's a tawdry misrepresentation of the real thing.

So with us, we must heed the words that John the Apostle of Love suddenly surprises us with in the end of his first letter, he says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols", for then you shall know who Hosea's God, the God of holy love: "love to the loveless shown that we might love they be."⁵

[END OF SERMON]

46:21

Let's pray.

Help us Lord our God in all the getting of knowledge to get wisdom. Help us to see the truth that you would teach us and the way that you would lead us and fill us with strong and deep and holy aspirations after you. And in this coming week, whatever progress we may make in this or that, or wherever we may be, grant, oh God, that we may have a deeper and ever deeper relationship with you. A better knowledge of you in your ways, til we become more and more like the Lord whose name we profess. So hear us, O Lord, and help us, and let your grace and your peace and your mercy fill our hearts this night through Jesus Christ, O Lord.

³ [What Kind of Love is This](#). Written by Bryn & Sally Haworth

⁴ [Your Love is the Most Incredible I've Ever Known](#). Artist: Barratt Band

⁵ [My Song is Love Unknown](#). Written by Samuel Crossman (1664)